

STORY OF HOPE AND INSPIRATION

MY LITTLE ENERGIZER BUNNY: MY MOM, BARBIE ZOLLA, HAS SURVIVED PANCREATIC CANCER FOR OVER A YEAR AND A HALF AND IS STILL GOING STRONG

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Barbie Zolla

My little energizer bunny – that’s my mom. She keeps going, and going, and always beats to the rhythm of her own drum. She’s always been that way. When I was little, while at work as a children’s social worker, she drove her car over an embankment, crashed into someone’s garage, walked away without the slightest scar and then proceeded to interview

her client. Years later, she got held up in front of our rabbi’s house on her birthday and was told not to scream. After she screamed at the top of her lungs, the two trouble makers ran away and she walked into the rabbi’s house to a meeting as if nothing had ever happened. A few years later, she broke her leg and refused to let that get in her way, so every morning she sat on her butt and rolled down 3 flights of stairs so she could go to work. She would never, ever miss a beat.

Nothing has changed. On my husband’s “Big 30” on April 3, 2007, we found out that my mom was diagnosed with advanced pancreatic cancer. Never in a million years did we think that our family could be touched and haunted by such a terrible disease. We were all shocked and scared—all of us, except my mom. She wasn’t fazed. She didn’t think she was sick even after she started chemotherapy, lost 20 pounds, and had piercing back pain where she couldn’t stand for more than a few minutes.

No, she wasn’t fazed. I’ve always thought she was a little nutty. Nothing ever got in her way, and this was no different. She started going to chemotherapy 2 days every other week with a pump that she took home for 48 hours – her newest little black purse. She experienced some nausea in the very beginning and months later some other unpleasant side effects (which we won’t mention) but, other than that, she functioned at 100%, just like everyone else. She never stayed at home. She went shopping, to the beauty shop and to The Grill on a regular basis, found me and my husband a beautiful home (since she is now in the real estate business after being a social worker for over 40 years) and continued going to lunch with her millions of friends on a daily basis.

And she, of course, continues to do all of this and more over a year and a half after her diagnosis. Not only is she the new CEO of lunches, but she has reunited with people she hasn’t talked to in years. Everyone is back in her life and wants a piece of my mom. It’s like she’s in high school all over again. She leaves the house at 8 a.m. and doesn’t come home until 10 p.m. We all tell her to slow down – her doctors tell her to slow down – after all, she needs her rest. But she won’t change. She is enjoying herself. She is buying jewelry, scarves, outfits and presents for her friends. Shopping is the new therapy. She says she’s fine and that she wants to live a normal life.

The best example of my unstoppable mom occurred after she was in the hospital for a few days. On the day she was released, she went straight from the hospital to the beauty shop to get her hair done and then went to temple for Rosh Hashanah. Our rabbis told her not to go to temple. We told her not to go. But she wouldn’t have it. Now, she is planning the “party of all parties” for her own 40th Wedding Anniversary while she is “negotiating” with her doctors about what type of surgery she’ll have if, and when, she becomes a candidate for surgery. Nothing gets this woman down. She doesn’t think she’s sick. She refuses to stay home or let any of us take care of her. She refuses to talk about this whole ordeal. She refuses to be scared or even remotely concerned. No – not my mom.

Maybe she isn’t the nutty one – maybe we’re the nutty ones. Maybe she’s got it right. She knows that attitude is half the battle. So, maybe denial is a better place to be—after all, she’s survived much longer than most people do with this horrible disease, and knowing her, she will keep beating her drum for a long long time. How does she do it? Maybe we can all learn a lesson from her. Maybe everyone faced with the challenge of this disease can learn a lesson from my mom – my little Energizer bunny.

PATIENT AND LIAISON SERVICES (PALS)

PALS offers information about treatments, clinical trials, symptoms and side effects, diet and nutrition, and support resources for patients and families facing pancreatic cancer. To learn more about pancreatic cancer, call PALS toll-free at 877-272-6226 or send a question by email to pals@pancan.org. PALS Associates are available M-F 8AM-5PM Pacific Time.

El programa de PALS esta disponible en español.